

Fire emphasized in sage grouse habitat strategy

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A new wildfire strategy designed to protect sagebrush terrain vital to a chicken-sized bird now under consideration for endangered species protection was announced by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell Tuesday, with Nevada officials praising proposals that they've been pushing for years.

The plan is detailed in the first of two reports called for in a secretarial order issued by Jewell in January and outlines actions and activities designed to reduce the size and severity of rangeland fires as the summer 2015 fire season quickly approaches. In Nevada, wildfire and the related invasion of cheatgrass and other non-native vegetation is described as the foremost danger facing populations of the greater sage grouse, a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The plan calls for a firefighting strategy making protection of prime sage grouse habitat a top priority. To do so it will, among other things, rely to a greater degree on the expertise of veteran fire crews, rural fire departments and fire protection associations made up of ranchers who can respond to a fire quickly.

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